

FACT SHEET: PA Academic Standards and the Common Core

What is an Academic Standard?

- Academic standards are statements of what students are expected to know and be able to do at specific grade levels.
- Standards focus on essential concepts, knowledge, and skills necessary for students to succeed and are designed to increase student achievement.
- Standards are a “goal line” set to achieve. How schools accomplish getting to that goal line is the day-to-day curriculum and other tools teachers use in the classroom. An example would be the daily lesson plan that guides teachers’ instruction.
- In Pennsylvania, the curriculum and other classroom tools are determined solely by the local school districts and their personnel.

What is the History of Academic Standards in Pennsylvania?

- Pennsylvania, like most other states, began implementing standards-based education in the mid-1990s. Prior to this, the state had no academic expectations for its students.
- As a result of this effort, the first standards in Pennsylvania were in *Mathematics* and *Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening*. These standards were adopted by the State Board of Education and became effective in January, 1999.
- Additional standards were adopted by the State Board of Education from 2002-2006 in the following subjects; Science and Technology, History, Health/Safety and Physical Education, Geography, Family and Consumer Science, Environment and Ecology, Economics, Civics and Government, Career Education and Work, Arts and Humanities.
- On July 1, 2010, the State Board of Education adopted improved standards in math and English to replace the original standards adopted in 1999. The standards were based off the Common Core initiative.

What is Common Core?

- The establishment of state education standards has always been – and remains – under the jurisdiction of each state. In order to provide consistency in standards for core subjects such as math and English, states began to recognize the need for common benchmarks across the country.
- A multi-state effort began as early as 2004 to determine if common standards in math and English could be identified. Several years later, the formal effort was coordinated by two entities representing state leaders in education policy.
 - National Governors Association (NGA) – which represents all states' chief executives, and;
 - Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) – which represents every states' top government official overseeing education (in Pennsylvania, this official is the Secretary of Education).
- NGA and CCSSO worked in collaboration with state officials, teachers, parents and other interested parties across the country to develop model standards in math and English for states to consider using. These model standards are now referred to as Common Core.
- This need was furthered illustrated by demands from the business community and higher education officials for more rigorous academic standards to produce high school graduates immediately ready to succeed in the workforce or college. This demand came from a broad cross-section of both business and academic officials.
- The Common Core standards provide:
 - Clear, understandable and consistent standards for all states to consider when developing their state-specific standards for math and English;
 - Evidence-based rigorous content;
 - Standards aligned with college and career readiness.
- No state is required by federal law to adopt Common Core. These are model standards developed by these state-led organizations and are recommended for states to consider.

What is Pennsylvania Common Core?

- Pennsylvania Common Core standards are based on the model developed by NGA and CCSSO, but tailored to meet our state-specific needs.
- Although the State Board of Education already adopted improved standards for math and English in 2010, the Board is in the process of amending the regulations to further improve these standards and tailor them even more to Pennsylvania's specific educational needs. This process resulted in Pennsylvania Common Core standards, which are similar to the model supported by NGA and CCSSO, but make further adjustments that are state-specific to Pennsylvania.

Myths and Facts about Common Core:

- *Myth – “This is a federal government initiative that encroaches upon states’ rights”*
 - *Fact* – This process began as a states-led initiative with support from NGA and CCSSO (organizations that represent state officials), and continues to be a state-led process. The model standards created by the state-led bodies are a recommended floor. State participation is voluntary and states reserve their right to do with these standards as they feel best for their states’ educational systems and students. In Pennsylvania, we have used the model standards as a base.
- *Myth – “Common Core includes data mining and large collections of unnecessary data on students and families”*
 - *Fact* – There is no new data collection requirement tied to Common Core. The model standards of Common Core that states may consider using do not jeopardize or preempt existing federal and state statutes protecting data and privacy concerns. The FERPA Law (Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act) protects education records from being disclosed without written parental consent, along with other federal and state statutes that guide the collection and use of data.
- *Myth – “Implementation of Common Core is expensive and costly to states”*
 - *Fact* – The model Common Core standards developed are baseline recommendations for states to consider. What each state decides to do with these standards, will determine what cost – if any – is assumed by each state. Pennsylvania has had standards developed since the late 1990s and are now using the model Common Core recommendations to raise the rigor of existing standards. The implementation of these standards and subsequent assessments will cost a very small fraction of the total dollars spent on public education each year in the Commonwealth; a small price to pay as a quality control measure for the approximately \$27 billion spent on public education in Pennsylvania.
- *Myth – “These standards are a national curriculum for schools.”*
 - *Fact* – These standards are not curriculum. They are a set of goals and expectations for the necessary knowledge and skills that will help our students succeed. State officials, local teachers, principals, superintendents and others still decide how the standards will be met. Local school districts have complete control over what curriculum to use to meet the standards. In short, Pennsylvania teachers and administrators are still in charge of curriculum used in their classrooms.
- *Myth – “Common Core includes a required reading list”*
 - *Fact* – Common Core does not mandate a reading list. The new state standards recommend a wide range of texts, but specific curriculum and choices of reading materials remains a local decision.
- *Myth – “Common Core will lead to Pennsylvania students taking a National Test”*
 - *Fact* – The regulations adopted in Pennsylvania in 2010, and any subsequent regulations under consideration, do not involve a national test. Pennsylvania students are not being asked to take a national test.

- *Myth – “Race To The Top grants and other federal funds forced states to adopt Common Core”*
 - *Fact* – Federal education funding for certain programs has for many years, under several Presidential administrations, included high-quality academic standards. However, federal law does not mandate specific standards and curriculum to be used. This has always been a sole responsibility of state and local education officials.
- *Myth – “Common Core brings down state standards”*
 - *Fact* – Common Core was a state-led initiative to improve standards across the country and is considered by educational experts to improve rigor in schools. In 2010, the State Board of Education commissioned an alignment study (conducted by the University of Pittsburgh) that found the recommended Common Core standards were highly correlated to math and English standards revisions the Board was already considering. This alignment study helped to assure the recommended Common Core standards were rigorous and similar to standards revisions being developed independently by Pennsylvania educators. It is also very important to stress that Common Core is a baseline model for standards and Pennsylvania adopted standards above the recommended model. States reserve the right to create standards as they feel best for their students; any state can exceed the baseline set in the model standards if they choose.
- *Myth – “No educators were involved in writing the standards”*
 - *Fact* – The model Common Core standards drafting process relied on teachers and standards experts from across the country. In addition, the effort was coordinated by the CCSSO, which represents every state’s chief education official. Once the model Common Core standards were finalized, every state had to then consider these standards through their own internal legislative and regulatory process, which included input from educators, administrators and other experts in each state. In addition, prior to adopting the Common Core in July of 2010, the State Board of Education held four public meetings across the Commonwealth to provide an opportunity for educators and parents to have input into the standards. Pennsylvania worked with teachers from across the Commonwealth since 2010 to modify the suggested standards to further meet the rigor our students need to attain in order to be successful.
- *Myth – “Teachers are being required to sign a ‘non-disclosure’ form because of Common Core”*
 - *Fact* – Common Core is not making Pennsylvania teachers sign a non-disclosure form. If any teachers in any districts are being asked to sign such a form, it is not a result of Common Core. The state has increased testing security measures as a result of the cheating investigations that have occurred across the state and educators who administer state assessments do have to sign forms assuring the security of the tests being administered, but these improvements in test security have no relation to Common Core.